

The Magician

Dave was short & stocky
so they put him in tanks
& he drove one from Normandy
to Berlin
with a cigar stuck between
his sour teeth.

Meanwhile back home
his wife Mary
my mother's sister
(a family of 12
with a drunk for a father),
Mary who had dancing slippers
when there wasn't bread to eat,
Mary who had dreams & visions
& tension headaches,
Mary had this other guy's baby.

I remember them coming
to live with us,
remember that tightness
on my mother's face,
remember that the baby was
a girl, tiny as a rat
& ugly, and the guy was
big, really big,
bigger than my father
who was off to war
& six foot one.

This guy wore
suits & overcoats,
white scarves
thick shoes
& silk socks.

He could bounce a quarter
off the wall
& catch a silver dollar.

He could make anyone laugh,
even my mother
who hated his guts.

He disappeared
when Dave came back,
talking war over quarts
of Pabst Blue Ribbon.

That was years ago.
Now Mary is an alcoholic,
the daughter grew up sluggish,
& Dave beats them both.

I've been gone for 20 years,
but I'll never forget that guy
who turned quarters into silver dollars:
It was a dirty trick.